

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 5-3-15 AM NOTES
"THE MARKS OF A KINGDOM FOCUSED CHURCH"
VARIOUS SCRIPTURES
#1 in Series, "A Kingdom Focused Church"

Matthew 6:33a (NKJV) "But seek first the kingdom of God..."

"To 'seek first' this kingdom is to desire as of first importance the spread of the reign of Jesus Christ. Such a desire will start with ourselves, until every single department of our life – home, marriage and family, personal morality, professional life and business ethics, bank balance, tax returns, life-style, citizenship – is joyfully and freely submissive to Christ. It will continue in our immediate environment, with the acceptance of evangelistic responsibility towards our relatives, colleagues, neighbors and friends. And it will also reach out in global concern for the missionary witness of the church." - John Stott

I. A Kingdom Focused Church Is a **Selfless** Church

2 Corinthians 4:4 (ESV) "In their case **the god of this world** has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

2 Kings 6:24-25 (NKJV) "24 And it happened after this that Ben-Hadad king of Syria gathered all his army, and went up and besieged Samaria. 25 And there was a great famine in Samaria; and indeed they besieged it until a donkey's head was sold for eighty *shekels* of silver, and one-fourth of a kab of dove droppings for five *shekels* of silver."

2 Kings 7:3-9 (NKJV) "3 Now there were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate; and they said to one another, 'Why are we sitting here until we die? 4 If we say, 'We will enter the city,' the famine *is* in the city, and we shall die there. And if we sit here, we die also. Now therefore, come, let us surrender to the army of the Syrians. If they keep us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall only die.' 5 And they rose at twilight to go to the camp of the Syrians; and when they had come to the outskirts of the Syrian camp, to their surprise no one was there. 6 For the Lord had caused the army of the Syrians to hear the noise of chariots and the noise of horses--the noise of a great army; so they said to one another, 'Look, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians to attack us!' 7 Therefore they arose and fled at twilight, and left the camp intact--their tents, their horses, and their donkeys--and they fled for their lives. 8 And when these lepers came to the outskirts of the camp, they went into one tent and ate and drank, and carried from it silver and gold and clothing, and went and hid *them*; then they came back and entered another tent, and carried *some* from there *also*, and went and hid *it*. 9 Then they said to one another, 'We are not doing right. This day *is* a day of good news, and we remain silent. If we wait until morning light, some punishment will come upon us. Now therefore, come, let us go and tell the king's household.'"

II. A Kingdom Focused Church Is Willing to Take **Risks**

A. **Undertaker** Churches

Revelation 3:1-2 (NKJV) 1 "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: 'I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.'"

Revelation 3:1b (AMP) "...you are supposed to be alive, but [in reality] you are dead."

“Worship of the past, greater concern with form than with life, love of tradition more than a love for Christ, inflexibility and resistance to change, and loss of evangelistic and missionary fervor.” – Chuck Swindoll

B. **Caretaker** Churches

Revelation 3:17 (NKJV) “Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'--and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked”.

“Disturb us O Lord when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams come true only because we have dreamed too little; when we arrive safely only because we have sailed too close to the shore; when with the abundance of things we are losing our thirst for more of God; when in loving time we have ceased to dream for eternity; when in our desire to build on this earth we have lost our vision for a new heaven. Disturb us O Lord.”

- Unknown

C. **Risk Taker** Churches

Revelation 3:7-8 (NKJV) ⁷ "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, *He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens*: ⁸ I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.'"

“Risks are not to be evaluated by the probability of success, but by the value of the goal.”

– Ralph Winter

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In the late 1990’s when we were building this building, I got a call from an angry church member. She let her opinions be known about what we were doing (let’s say that she was not excited nor was she “on board” with where the church was going). As her parting shot toward me she asked me this question: “Are you sure you’re not just trying to keep up with [she named another growing church in the area] and building **your** kingdom up there on the hill?” I would like to change that question around a little and ask it of all of us who are a part of this church. “Are we involved in building God’s Kingdom or are we building our little kingdom on the hill to be a place where we are comfortable and can live with minimum challenge and risk?” Should our theme song be “Onward Christian Soldiers” or “Hold the Fort for I Am Coming”?

One of the first things that we need to do is to make sure we understand what we are talking about when we talk about the Kingdom of God. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said in **Matthew 6:33a (NKJV)**

“But seek first the kingdom of God...” Exactly what are we seeking when we seek first the Kingdom of God? The kingdom of God is made up of God’s born again people all over the world who live under Christ’s rule and reign. To seek the Kingdom of God is to seek to spread the kingdom by making disciples from every tongue, tribe, people and nation. John Stott says it well: “To ‘seek first’ this kingdom is to desire as of first importance the spread of the reign of Jesus Christ. Such a desire will start with ourselves, until every single department of our life – home, marriage and family, personal morality, professional life and business ethics, bank balance, tax returns, life-style, citizenship – is joyfully and freely submissive to Christ. It will continue in our immediate environment, with the acceptance of evangelistic responsibility towards our relatives, colleagues, neighbors and friends. And it will also reach out in global concern for the missionary witness of the church.” [John Stott, “Christian Counter-Culture”, Page 170]. The phrase “seek first” is emphatic! That means we are to make our first priority to seek with all our being, all our resources the spread of His kingdom. That must be our individual and corporate focus.

No church naturally drifts toward a Kingdom focus! We drift into comfort zones where we have our schedules that we organize our lives around and we seek to do that which we are “comfortable” with. We prefer doing that which we are familiar with and we tend to pull back from the unknown. This is why people hate change. Change makes us uncomfortable. Change brings out “meanness” in some people. It seems that some have as their life verse, “Thou shalt resist all change at all times for any purpose!” That does not come from the Bible!

Let me share a testimony with you that I would have asked permission, but the person I am referring to is on a mission trip in East Asia. Kirk and Kim Smith were about as involved here as any couple could possibly be. Kim worked in a leadership position in the preschool ministry and Kirk was a deacon and heavily involved in many ministries. Kirk’s father died when he was very young and an uncle in Georgia was his mentor, especially in spiritual matters. Kirk was talking to his uncle one day about how much he loved his church and all that he had learned and his uncle asked him a penetrating question. He said, “Why are you still there?” Kirk was caught off guard asked his uncle to clarify his question. His uncle said something like this: “You’ve been in that church for almost 20 years and you know the Scriptures and you are capable of teaching them; there is a vast need out there; you’ve soaked up a lot; it’s time that you begin to pour yourself out in the Body of Christ”. That is a loose paraphrase that I am giving from memory, but I believe it is accurate. When Kirk’s uncle jarred him with those words we had just developed this relationship with FBC Fountain City that resulted in merging the two churches. I was asking for families here – especially families with children to consider moving to the Fountain City Campus to invest their lives there. Kirk said he knew that this was what the Lord had for him and his young family. They chose to leave their comfort zone and now Kim is a leader in the preschool ministry and Kirk is the lay leader for missions as well as scores of other ministries on the Fountain City Campus.

I know that God is not going to lead all of you to go out to other churches and ministries. He desires that a strong core stays here at the “home base” to help equip the saints and to minister here, but there will be many that He does call and my burden is that you listen and obey. By God’s grace we will be an “all in Kingdom focused church” One of the reasons that we are coming together in one service (not the only reason) is that when God opens doors, we will be able to send people out and not have to spread less people over two services as we grow numerically in adding people to take the place of those who God has moved out.

To introduce this series, I want us to see two primary marks of a Kingdom focused church.

I. A Kingdom Focused Church Is a Selfless Church

A church that refuses to focus on the Kingdom of God is a selfish church. We live in a selfish, self centered world and the church is to be in contrast to this world that has Satan as it’s god (2 Corinthians 4:4). We are to be a selfless church in a selfish world. How can those who have experienced God’s amazing grace be selfish and refuse to proclaim it to others?

Let me give you an example of this choice between selfless and selfish. In the book of 2 Kings we find an interesting and not widely known account. Here is the background. The Syrians have besieged the

capital of Israel's northern kingdom, Samaria. To besiege a city is to surround its walls and refuse to let anyone out and refuse to allow in supplies to sustain life. It amounts to starving a city into submission. The Syrian tactic was working. **2 Kings 6:24-25 (NKJV)** “²⁴ And it happened after this that Ben-Hadad king of Syria gathered all his army, and went up and besieged Samaria. ²⁵ And there was a great famine in Samaria; and indeed they besieged it until a donkey's head was *sold* for eighty *shekels* of silver, and one-fourth of a kab of dove droppings for five *shekels* of silver.” This was serious famine. Let me introduce you to 4 other characters in **2 Kings 7:3-9 (NKJV)** “³ Now there were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate; and they said to one another, ‘Why are we sitting here until we die? ⁴ If we say, ‘We will enter the city,’ the famine *is* in the city, and we shall die there. And if we sit here, we die also. Now therefore, come, let us surrender to the army of the Syrians. If they keep us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall only die.’ ⁵ And they rose at twilight to go to the camp of the Syrians; and when they had come to the outskirts of the Syrian camp, to their surprise no one *was* there. ⁶ For the Lord had caused the army of the Syrians to hear the noise of chariots and the noise of horses--the noise of a great army; so they said to one another, ‘Look, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians to attack us!’ ⁷ Therefore they arose and fled at twilight, and left the camp intact--their tents, their horses, and their donkeys--and they fled for their lives. ⁸ And when these lepers came to the outskirts of the camp, they went into one tent and ate and drank, and carried from it silver and gold and clothing, and went and hid *them*; then they came back and entered another tent, and carried *some* from there *also*, and went and hid *it*. ⁹ Then they said to one another, ‘We are not doing right. This day *is* a day of good news, and we remain silent. If we wait until morning light, some punishment will come upon us. Now therefore, come, let us go and tell the king's household.’” It was the desperate need of others and the abundance of the supply they had that motivated them to share the good news. I think you can see the application. For those of us who know Christ, who have partaken of His mercy and grace and His very life, and know what it is to have peace with God and the assurance of eternal life, how can we be indifferent to those who don't know whether it is in some severely under reached area in Knox County or an unreached people group in Tibet?

We must realize that our default position that we always will drift into is selfishness. If we are going to be a selfless church in a selfish world, we must be intentional to keep moving out, keep changing to do whatever is necessary without compromising the clear Word of God to reach a new generation, and to go to the hard places to establish churches and thereby serve the feast of the Gospel to those who are spiritually starving. We must resist the temptation to fall into the calm and comfort of self-centered fruitlessness.

II. A Kingdom Focused Church Is Willing to Take Risks

Most everything we need to know about diagnosing and solving the problems of the church can be found in Revelation 2 and 3. In these two chapters we have letters from the Lord Jesus Himself to seven churches that I believe represent all churches. I want to look at three of these churches in Revelation 3 and see three categories of churches. The third one is a great example of a Kingdom focused church.

A. Undertaker Churches

Revelation 3:1-2 (NKJV) ¹ "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: 'I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. ² Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.'”

In Sardis, we see a church that Jesus says is dead. I'm sure that they didn't think of themselves as dead, but that was Jesus' assessment of them. Verse 1b in the Amplified Translation says, “...you are supposed to be alive but in reality you are dead.” Churches in this category tend to focus on their past reputation and memories instead of their vision for the future. There was a likely a lot of activity in the FBC of Sardis but there was no real life.

There's some real interesting history for the town of Sardis. It was located in a place that made it almost impossible to reach by enemy forces. It was built on the side of a mountain and it was almost impossible for enemy armies to capture. Yet, twice in their history they had been captured by enemy forces. Both times an enemy soldier had climbed up the mountain, sneaked into the city and opened the gates from the inside and the enemy army marched in and took the city. How did that happen? They weren't alert to potential danger and they were ignorant to their vulnerability. That's why in verse 2 they are told to be watchful. Here is the main problem with so many churches either in or close to that undertaker category. They are unaware that things are as bad as they are. They do not want to face the facts! Chuck Swindoll gave these characteristics of a dead or dying church. "Worship of the past, greater concern with form than with life, love of tradition more than a love for Christ, inflexibility and resistance to change, and loss of evangelistic and missionary fervor."

It is interesting that even though the general condition of the church is death, there were still some people there who had life. The fact that He tells them what to do in verses 2-3 shows that there is some hope. This is where we believe that God desires to use us. When a struggling to survive church is willing, a church that is blessed of God with people and resources can come alongside and be used of God to take a church like Sardis and help it come back to health. We must be careful to not have an arrogant attitude that communicates that we are the ones that have it all together and have all the answers. We do not have it all together and we certainly do not have all of the answers. However if we come with a spirit of humility and make ourselves available, we believe that God will guide us and we can see Him restore hope in a church that is struggling to stay alive. Allow me to get a little technical. The umbrella term for helping struggling churches is "church revitalization". That revitalization can take several different forms. It can be a merger of the two churches where the struggling church becomes a campus of the healthier church. This is what we did with First Baptist Fountain City. Revitalization can be a coming alongside a struggling church and provide resources of primarily people and direction and some finances and when the church reaches a place of health, the revitalizing church pulls back and asks God to give another church with which they can come alongside to see revitalization. A third possibility is to come to a church that has completely died and disbanded and take their facilities and replant a new church with people and resources coming from the revitalizing church. That is three possible scenarios, but there may be other possibilities that we or our denominational leaders have never thought of. Our God is a creative God.

B. Caretaker Churches

The caretaker church is represented by the church at Laodicea. There are lots of things that we can learn from this church, I want to just focus in on one problem that this church had. I certainly do not think that we are a Laodicean church, but there is one characteristic of this church that we have to diligently guard against. **Revelation 3:17 (NKJV)** "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'--and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked". The caretaking church plans and organizes things and avoids risk so they can say, "We're in control; we can handle it; we have need of nothing." They never step out into deep water over their head; they never risk failure to see God accomplish a "God-sized" task. They have need of nothing, and they see nothing done that cannot be explained away by human work, ingenuity, and organization. Laodicea was a rich banking center, but verse 17 says they were poor. Laodicea was a fashion center, but Jesus said in Verse 17 they were naked. Laodicea was famous for its eye salve but the Lord said they were blind. Like the water that ran down the mountain from the hot mineral springs that became lukewarm and undrinkable, this caretaking church had become like lukewarm mineral water to the Lord and made Him choose to spew them out of His mouth. A caretaking church is one that is unwilling to risk. It has programming that is designed to keep the status quo and avoid any chance of failure. The caretaking church begins to fear the unknown, mistrust the untried, and abhor the new. They become a member of the largest and most dangerous cult out there – the cult of the comfortable. The caretaker church begins to value unity over truth. They don't want to say or do anything that will offend anyone. They value pleasing people over pleasing God. Any time a church seeks God and begins to step out to join Him in what He is doing, there will be risk from a human standpoint because God wants us to always be over our head so that we have to totally depend on Him. It

is so easy for a church to fall into this category. "Let's just keep the peace, run the programs, take no risk of failure, don't do anything that would make anybody upset." I have in my files a prayer prayed by some unknown person. I have so often been blessed by it. "Disturb us O Lord when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams come true only because we have dreamed too little; when we arrive safely only because we have sailed too close to the shore; when with the abundance of things we are losing our thirst for more of God; when in loving time we have ceased to dream for eternity; when in our desire to build on this earth we have lost our vision for a new heaven. Disturb us O Lord." There are literally thousands of churches that were once risk taking churches that now have slipped into the caretaking category. In verse 19 Jesus tells us to be zealous and repent! There are Undertaker Churches and Caretaker Churches.

C. Risk Taker Churches

Revelation 3:7-8 (NKJV) ⁷"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, *He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens*: ⁸I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.'" Whereas the undertaker church has its focus on the past and the caretaker church has its focus on the present, the risk taker church acknowledges the past, obeys God in the present, but the focus is on the future. The folks in a risk taker church know that the best is always yet to come. Learn this: any time we obey God, there is, from a human viewpoint, risk. Ralph Winter said, "Risks are not to be evaluated by the probability of success, but by the value of the goal." That's great! That's why being a part of a risk taking church is a great adventure. You can never become comfortable. You will never avoid controversy and some contention. Any step of faith will always be interpreted by some as presumption and unwise behavior. As I look back on my almost four decades as a Pastor, I have seen a pattern. When there was calm and little outward contention in the church, there was little fruit. When there was abundant fruit, there was dissention, people upset over change and threatening to leave (or actually leaving) the church. It got downright uncomfortable. I want to make it clear that I love unity and stability, but when we are going through the open doors, there seems to be problems galore! God has set before us open doors and everything God leads us to do will be so big that if God doesn't supernaturally work, we will surely fail. He always calls us to that which is beyond our ability so that we must place our dependence upon Him.

CONCLUSION

Over the next three weeks until we come together in one worship service time, we will focus on what it means to be a risk taking church and give more details of where we are headed. Today, I want us to focus on getting our hearts ready.